

CHAPTER THREE - AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The Affected Environment chapter describes the present condition of the physical, biological, social, and economic environment within the U.S. Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Vernal Planning Area (VPA) prior to the initiation of the Proposed Action or any alternative. This chapter is organized by existing natural resources and describes the present uses of these resources, fire management, special land designations, and the present socioeconomic conditions. This information provides the basis for evaluating potential changes in the environment due to implementation of the Proposed Action or any alternative.

3.1.1 Geographic Setting

The vast area of the VPA covered by this Resource Management Plan (RMP) revision is located in northeastern Utah and includes the Uinta Basin, the East and West Tavaputs Plateaus, the Eastern Uinta Mountains, the Book Cliffs, Diamond Mountain, Nine Mile Canyon, and Browns Park. The area is bounded on the west by the Wasatch Mountains and on the east by the Douglas Creek Arch in Colorado. The Uinta Mountains form the northern boundary of the VPA, and the Tavaputs Plateau and the Book Cliffs form the southern boundary (BLM 1982).

3.1.2 Resource Setting

Within the VPA, public lands administered by the BLM encompass 31% (1,725,512 acres) of the land area. Most of the land that the BLM manages is in the eastern and southern portions of the VPA and is generally characterized by habitats associated with the Colorado Plateau. Other government agencies that manage land in the area include the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), U.S. National Park Service (NPS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR), and Utah School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration (SITLA). Additional lands are held in private ownership or are located within the boundaries of the Uintah and Ouray Indian Reservation.

The lands of the VPA are characterized by a variety of valuable natural resources, including oil, natural gas, minerals, livestock forage, and unique vistas and land formations that draw both developers and visitors to the area. These user groups place demands on the resources under the jurisdiction of the BLM that either directly or indirectly affect the management of associated resources.

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